

A new beginning by hoppingmad

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Summary:

The first time Hopper sees Joyce when he returns to Hawkin's to become Chief of Police.

(might want to read "Bitter" first, but not necessary)

A new beginning

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The knock at the door gave him such a fright he dropped the cans of beer he had been putting into the fridge. He swore loudly and kicked the cans across the kitchen floor instead of picking them up. So far, his return to Hawkin's was just *not* going well. The trailer was the only place he could afford post-divorce, so he had stored most of his shit at his grandfathers' cabin and kept the bare necessities here at the place he was going to be calling *home* for the foreseeable future.

He had honestly thought things couldn't get worse, except that when he opened the door he found Joyce Horowitz, well no – Joyce Byers on his doorstep. She may have kicked the prick out, but to save the boys having to change their last name she still hadn't dropped the *Byers*. It pissed him off more than it should.

She was still so beautiful, she had aged gracefully – unlike him. She was looking up at him, all doe eyed. He could tell she was nervous, her shoulders were hunched inwards and she kept tucking her hair behind her ears.

"What are you doing here?" He asked, not moving from the doorway. The last thing he wanted to do was sit down with the woman who had broken his heart while he was in fucking Vietnam. I mean what kind of bitch breaks up with him via a letter? Honestly. He hadn't even bothered reading the other letters she had sent over the years, not even after Sara when he was a lot less bitter and his PTSD had lessened thanks to the cocktail of drugs his psychiatrist had put him on.

The letter had been straight to the point. She had slept with Lonnie Byers six months after he left and unfortunately the birth control had failed, and she was pregnant. She planned to move in with Lonnie,

who had reluctantly agreed to step up to the plate since – as she put it – it took two to tango.

He had loved Joyce Horowitz for as long as he remembered. They had both grown up in Hawkin's and she had been his best friend from the age of seven and upwards. He had always had a crush on her, but he had never found the courage to tell her how he felt. They had remained best friends through all their disastrous high school relationships. Though their friendship had been volatile at times, he would have laid down his life for her.

It had hurt more than anything in his life to receive the letter, up until that point anyway. It had taken all his strength to continue living. He knew from the moment he had read her letter that he would not be returning to Hawkin's. The thought of watching Joyce and Lonnie bring up a child and play happy families made him want to throw up. It wasn't until he lost Sara that he realised there was worse in life than simply losing someone you loved to another man.

"Uh, welcome home." He snapped back to reality at her words. He had tried to find a way to forgive her, find a way for them to be friends again – and in this moment to simply find a way to be civil with her. But it still fucking hurt.

"I can't do this right now." He told her, and he knew he sounded like an asshole, but he was too exhausted to pussy foot around.

"Jim..." she pleaded, her eyes filling with tears.

"You don't get to call me that." He told her firmly, holding onto his anger was easier than giving in. He knew he was taking the cowards way out, perhaps there was a way to mend bridges with the woman before him... but he couldn't risk anymore heartbreak, not now, not ever.

She looked as though she was going to say something more, but he shut the door before she had a chance. He knew Joyce had been abused by Lonnie over the years and though it hurt his heart to know she had been hurt, something in him, a very small but dark part thought she deserved it after all she had done. He tried to hold onto the thought, but it slipped away as images of a bruised and broken

Joyce flooded his mind. She didn't deserve that, no-one did.

He slid to the floor, his head banging against the now closed door to his trailer. He felt bile rise to his throat, and tears sting his eyes. Why did his life have to be such a fucking mess?

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After a week of self-pitying and self-destructive behaviour Hopper finally decided he had to go find Joyce and apologise. Hawkin's was a small town, they had to at least be civil with one another. He didn't want to have a conversation about their past, ever... but he had to smooth things over. He had been far harsher than necessary when she had turned up at his trailer the other day, and he could not get the image of her standing on his doorstep, her eyes filled with tears. He wasn't like *Lonnie*, despite all the pain he felt from their past – he didn't want to hurt her.

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He found her at Melvald's and forced a smile on his face as he entered the store.

"Hey Joyce," he leaned against the counter and felt terrible when she shrank away from him, the small amount of colour in her cheeks fading.

"Hello," she cleared her throat and crossed her arms protectively over her chest. "What can I do for you?" He hadn't expected to see the fear in her expression, he wasn't sure what he expected really. Anger perhaps? He had forgotten that in the almost twenty years since he saw her last that life had not been kind to her. He shouldn't have been surprised she wasn't the confident and rather feisty girl he had known when before he had been drafted all those years ago.

"I came to apologise." He took his hat off and twisted it anxiously in his hands. He took a step away from the counter, trying to be less intimidating. Joyce didn't move and still wouldn't meet his eyes. It made him sick to watch and the hatred he already had for Lonnie increased ten-fold. "You didn't deserve... what I did the other day."

“Maybe I did,” she sighed, her crossed arms falling to her sides, shoulders slumping. “I shouldn’t have assumed you would want to see me. Not after...” she trailed off.

“I’m back and I want to be on speaking terms with you.”

“Okay.” He can’t help but smile when she bites her lower lip, chewing on it the way she had as a kid. Some things never changed. “I know you don’t want to be my friend, but I do hope that one day you don’t hate me as much as you do now.” She tells him, and he can see how hard it is for her to open up like this. He didn’t blame her after he literally slammed the door in her face the last time.

“I don’t hate you.” He’s pleased to find that he really doesn’t hate her. He couldn’t say he was ready to be friends with her again... but the pain and anger he had once held onto so tightly seemed to be disintegrating, every time he saw her it became less and less.

“I’ll see you around then *Chief Hopper*,” she smiles, and he finds himself returning it.

The End